



A bridge for the poor?

“Barking dogs and building bridges” (attached, and linked below) is Lauren Royston’s subtle and patient demolition of the simplistic bourgeois platitudes of Hernando de Soto.

De Soto is a Peruvian and the author of a book called “The Mystery of Capital” published in 2000. He subsequently visited South Africa. De Soto advocates globalised capitalism, and claims to have found a way of incorporating the poorest of the poor within a regulated, universal framework of property and economic practice.

Royston does not take a heavy axe to de Soto but recognises that he had achieved a remarkable propaganda success (quickly forgotten, but occasionally, as in the 2014 general elections in South Africa, revived) in a field where academics

like herself and the advocacy groups “Leap” and “Afra”, among many others, had found themselves being ignored for years, and even decades. Though they may have disliked de Soto’s ideology, yet they were in some measure happy that de Soto had secured wide publicity for the “extra-legal” (i.e. outside the law) arrangements by which poor people are in practice obliged to manage their lives.

Royston’s scholarship takes us from Grahamstown, 1850, via the Glen Grey Act and parts of KZN to Cosmo City, Phola Park and Thokoza, and to a firm understanding of the enduring empirical condition of South Africa’s petty-bourgeois and peasant poor (who happen to be allies of the working class in the National Democratic Revolution).

Who are our allies?

In terms of this course on Development, this part’s several texts (and there is a fourth one to come) are intended to open us to a much more detailed, and a much less vague, understanding of our class allies.

The petty-bourgeoisie and the peasants are not “progressive”. Unlike the proletariat, they do not have a glorious future ahead of them. On the other hand, they are not simply “Trojan horses” for the big bourgeoisie, but are severely oppressed in the present system. The big bourgeoisie feeds off the small bourgeoisie in many ways, as Rosa Luxemburg could see. Even so, the petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry share one great characteristic with the big

bourgeoisie: they seek private wealth and property. The picture contains contradictions, and therefore it requires careful study.

The petty-bourgeoisie and the peasantry are the soil from which the big bourgeoisie (the large-scale proprietors, the bankers, and the capitalist employers of thousands) have sprung. They are also the soil from which the proletariat has sprung, but in the case of the latter, only because of utter dispossession – complete absence of productive property – enforced by the actions of the predatory big bourgeoisie.

Looking at these classes very specifically, and with evidence of their nature in front of us, it becomes clear why, within the National Democratic Revolution, the proletariat is allied with the peasantry and/or the petty-bourgeoisie. They must be with us, and not with our opponents, against us.

Once again it becomes clear that development is class struggle. What can happen, and what does or does not happen, is determined by the competing class interests within the overall political economy of the country, as Lauren Royston points out in the attached text.

Postscript: In the 2014 national elections in South Africa, Hernando de Soto's quack remedies were once more rolled out, this time by the DA, and criticised in turn by the SACP's 1st Deputy General Secretary, Cde Jeremy Cronin, in Umsebenzi Online, Volume 13, Number 16 ([click here](#) to read the article).

Image: Cadastral overlay on a satellite image from an Internet site describing a recent first-time property survey of Bhutan, the world's last remaining feudal state. Presumably this survey was done so as to assist the encroachment of banking and capitalistic property relations in that country.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Barking dogs, building bridges, Lauren Royston](#).
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